

NOVEMBER 13, 1980

Only enough wind blows now to keep the water tanks full. Afternoon temperatures rise into the 80s. Along the river in Mertzon, the evening sun projects off gold and amber leaves turning the creek area into a gilded forest unrelated to any other parts of the Shortgrass Country.

I go there every afternoon on my walk, and am amazed that the land that produced a scorching summer heat wave is able to recast a scene of such lovely autumn splendor. In August the airlines in San Angelo had to make big discounts on roundtrip tickets. Everybody with a credit card or the coin to buy was fleeing to the mountains. Long lines of traffic in San Angelo were made up of angry citizens trapped in a merciless heat. In the bigger cities, the heat wave was worse. Dallas and Houston and San Antonio were inhabited by a people trapped under air-conditioning.

Late yesterday afternoon I climbed down underneath a large willow right on the river bank. One of those river willows that umbrella out over the water and reflect a double image of green and gold flecks on the river's surface.

Purple tinged white asters were blooming at the water line. An unknown yellow flower made a last stand before winter burned her stems. My wife's dog made a quick change from a house pet to a hunter filled by the smell of river game.

Five years ago, the Corps of Engineers in all their bureaucratic might ordained that all of the watershed in the United States was to be under the jurisdiction of their departmental realm. Possums and squirrels and willows and asters were going to be in their domain. Lily pads and bullfrogs and watercress and channel catfish were going to be covered by section 302 b. But the country wasn't as highly civilized as they supposed. Somewhere in their quest, the rivers were spared the insanity and greed of the bureaucratic world.

Autumn has spread from the river across the grasslands. Mesquites still hold on to yellowing green leaves. Native grasses are red and based of green. Butterflies and wasps make lazy flights before they hibernate or migrate away from the cold.

How deceptive the Shortgrass Country can be. She sure makes us pay a price to receive her small favors. I'm under her spell once again. I'd like you to see our river some fall when you are passing through town.